CHILDREN'S MUSEUM NEWS

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART
FOUNDED BY EDWARD DRUMMOND LIBBEY

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FLEMISH - XVI CENTURY THE MARRIAGE OF HENRY VI

GIFT OF EDWARD DRUMMOND LIBBEY

A PAINTING OF AN ENGLISH KING

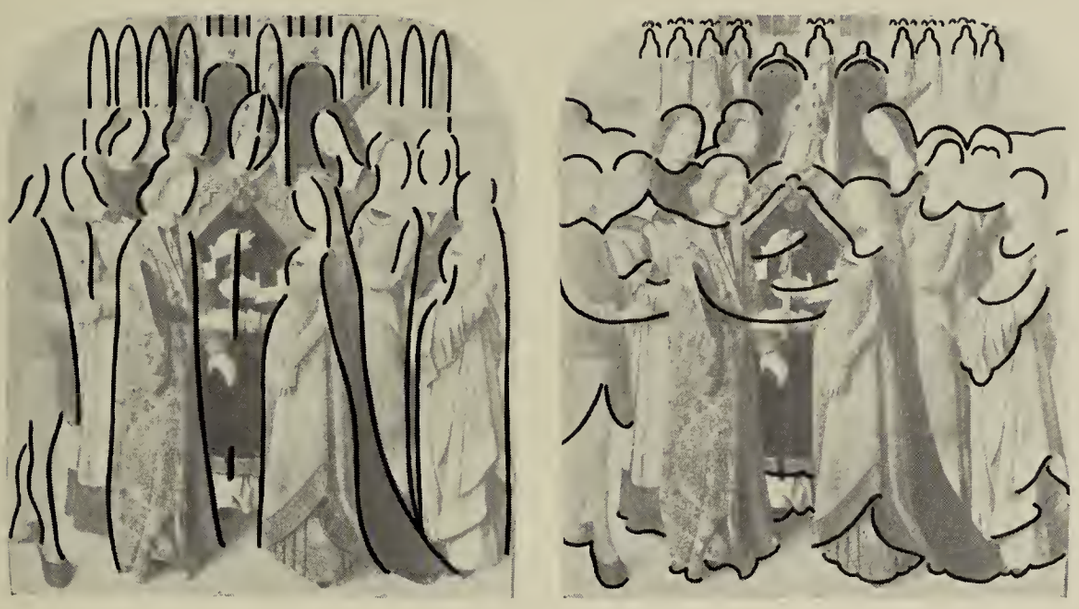
MANY of the great pictures which we enjoy today have been famous for hundreds of years. However, they have not always been placed where everyone could know them, for most of them were made for kings and queens, and for wealthy nobles who kept them in their private galleries. The poor people and the working people seldom had an opportunity to see them. How different it is today when beautiful museums, such as our own, are open every day to all who wish to enjoy the art in them.

In the Toledo Museum of Art is a painting which shows the marriage of an English king. Once it belonged to a famous English statesman, but the picture was painted several hundred years before he obtained it for his collection. Whether it was made for the king shown in the picture or for someone else is not known today. The painter, too, is unknown, for he did not sign his picture and no record of his making it has been found. In the Museum the picture is called a Flemish Primitive. Do you know what is meant by this title?

The western part of Belgium has long been called Flanders. From that district, five centuries ago, came some of the finest artists of northern Europe. The kings of the other countries were glad to have them paint at their courts. These Flemish artists took great care to make everything in their pictures look very real. Their portraits were never more beautiful than the persons who posed for them. When you have looked closely at the Flemish Primitive you will see why it is thought to be the work of one of these artists.

The word "primitive" is used for the quaint, stiffly arranged paintings made by the early artists who did not always know how to draw the human figure correctly. Often these painters used such smooth brush strokes that even in the details they can hardly be seen. Can you see why this painting is called a primitive?

Perhaps you would like to know something of the English king, Henry the Sixth, who, we think, is the one shown in this painting being married to the French princess, Margaret of Anjou. Henry became king of England when he was only nine months old. Of course, someone had to rule for him. However, soon after he had learned to walk he was made to appear before the people at the great ceremonies. He even had to attend Parliament. When he was five years old he was made a knight. Can you imagine a kindergarten boy dressed as a knight and carrying a sword in a dignified manner? At eight years old Henry was crowned king in a beautiful



ceremony in Westminster Abbey. Although he still had many advisors he was able then to begin to take part in the government.

During the wars which had been begun many years before Henry's birth England had won parts of France and so it was decided that young Henry should also be crowned king of France, in Rheims cathedral. But when Henry and his court reached France they met with some difficulties.

It happened that only a year before Henry had been crowned in England, the brave Joan of Arc and her soldiers had driven the English army almost out of France. Then Joan had ordered that the French prince—or the dauphin, as he was called—should be crowned at Rheims, for because of the long wars the crowning ceremony had not taken place although the old king had died many years before. The coronation in the French cathedral occurred only a few months before young Henry was crowned in England.

So when Henry arrived in France there was already a king of that country and Joan was fighting the English with all her strength. Do you remember the story of how Joan of Arc was captured and after a year of trials was burned at the stake in Rouen? After her death Henry, who was by this time ten years old, was crowned king of France.

The French people did not like to be ruled by an English king, so in order to make them feel that they were being governed by one of their own people it was arranged that Henry would marry the French princess, Margaret. Perhaps it was this very marriage that some Flemish artist painted a few years after, in this painting which is now in the Museum.

Let us see what makes this a great painting. The design of the picture is one of the important things to look for because the design was a part of the language of the artist. Notice how the bishop stands in the center, before the church. The king and his four attendants and the princess and her four ladies are placed on either side of him balancing each other. This arrangement gives dignity and formality to the picture. On one of the illustrations are marked the tall flowing lines of the garments which also add dignity and quietness to the design. Surely a royal wedding was a dignified and formal event and the design of the picture makes it appear to have been so.

On the other illustration you will see how the heads and shoulders of the people form a rhythmical pattern across the picture. And the hems of their beautiful garments and the toes of their slippers produce another. However the two rhythms are quite different. Can you feel the difference? If you will clap them with your hands, using louder claps for the larger curves you will hear the difference as well as see it. And you will know that it is these moving rhythms which give life and interest to the painting.

We have already mentioned that the primitive artists did not always know how to draw people perfectly. Even the artist who did this painting did not make all of the feet and hands correctly, but he did make all of the faces individual. They are painted as if they were actual portraits, and some of them have much expression. Don't you think that he enjoyed painting the haughty woman who wears the turban, the annoyed young woman with the long golden hair, and the partly bald man with the long nose? The bishop's face has been modeled with great care. How different it is from the weak face of the young king. Henry was never a strong character. The painter has shown his weakness in the expression of his mouth.

Notice the beautiful clothes worn by royal people at the time that Henry lived. The patterns on those at the center are so exactly painted that we know from them some of the designs which were woven in that century. The artist was careful to place costumes of plain cloth behind the patterned ones so that the designs in them would be outstanding.

When you see this painting in the Museum you will think the colors are lovely. The bright red, and the light and dark yellow-greens, with the yellow-oranges, sometimes darkened to brown, are arranged so that they, as well as the lines, form rhythms across the painting. See if you can find some of these rhythms in the colors which are still clear and brilliant although they were put on the panel centuries ago.